

Introduction

"Cradled in the Holy Ghost"

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) was the most well-known preacher of the nineteenth century, and his popularity in his time can hardly be quantified. On August 1, 1857, the Saturday edition of the *Dublin Evening Packet and Correspondent* simply stated, “Mr. Spurgeon is a notability.”¹ Yet the article’s most pressing question about Spurgeon’s popularity was, “How is the matter to be explained?”² Spurgeon was only twenty-three years old at the time and had already led New Park Street Chapel to renovate and expand their facility to accommodate newcomers. During the renovation, the congregation moved their Sunday meetings to Exeter Hall, and to the congregation’s amazement, crowds filled the temporary location to such capacity that the regular attenders were too numerous for the expanded Chapel.

The author of the 1857 newspaper article tried in vain to describe the reason for Spurgeon’s meteoric rise in popularity:

Mr. Spurgeon’s origin and ecclesiastical connection do not solve the mystery.... We must add there is nothing in Mr. Spurgeon’s presence to account for his success.... His figure is short and chubby, and rather awkward than otherwise. For so young a man there seems to be a strong tendency in him to grow stout. He knows nothing of the aesthetics of dress: everything of that sort about him is commonplace, verging upon the vulgar.³

1. “Charles Spurgeon and the Pulpit,” *Dublin Evening Packet and Correspondent*, August 1, 1857, 3.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

Crowds of “common people ... professional men, senatorial men, ministers of state, and peers of the realm,” were flocking to hear this new and dynamic young preacher.⁴ Still, something more than mere words drew the people; there was “something very extraordinary in [his words] everyone must feel.”⁵ His popularity was obvious and his influence was palpable, but the reason for his popularity was not easily explained.

Even more inexplicably, the August 1, 1857 *Dublin Evening Packet* article was published less than ten months after the Royal Surrey Music Hall disaster, which was caused by the actions of individuals intending to disrupt the growing influence of Spurgeon’s ministry. On the Sunday evening service of October 19, 1856, during Spurgeon’s pastoral prayer, some in the crowd falsely cried out that a fire was in the building, and caused a panic among the 12,000 in attendance. As people in the galleries evacuated in haste, some fell down a staircase and were trampled beneath the crowd. Seven persons lost their lives, and twenty-eight needed medical attention. In his final sermon at the New Park Street Chapel, before moving to the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Spurgeon reflected on that tragic event:

I am sure that when we first went to the Surrey Music Hall, God went with us. Satan went too, but he fled before us. That frightful calamity, the impression of which can never be erased from my mind, turned out in the providence of God to be one of the most wonderful means of turning public attention to special services. And I do not doubt that it—fearful catastrophe though it was—has been the mother of multitudes of blessings. The Christian world noted the example, they saw its after-success, they followed it, and to this day, in the theater and in the cathedral, the Word of God is preached where it was never preached before.⁶

Nothing could stop or disrupt the growth of Spurgeon’s ministry. Despite the devastating catastrophe, his utter unimpressiveness in appearance, his undignified social status, and the negativity he received in the press, his popularity only grew. In fact, requests

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. *MTP* 7.166.

for the young minister became so overwhelming that on Saturday, June 15, 1861, just thirteen weeks after the opening service of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Spurgeon took out an advertisement in the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* announcing, “Mr. Spurgeon begs to inform the public that he is knocked up with hard work, and is compelled to go into the country to rest. This will upset all his arrangements, and he begs his friends to remit his promises, and the Christian public not to inundate him with invitations.”⁷

Spurgeon’s notability persisted throughout his ministry. Over the course of his pastorate, crowds poured into the Metropolitan Tabernacle, and the reputation of his great preaching spread across the Atlantic at an unquenchable pace. In 1856, *The North American Review* evaluated the edited volume by E. L. Magoon titled *The Modern Whitefield: The Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, of London. His Sermons. With an Introduction and Sketch of His Life*.⁸ The reviewer noted of the twenty-two-year-old Spurgeon, “His popularity is immense, exceeding that of any man since the days of Whitefield.”⁹ Two years later, the same journal again assessed Spurgeon with a disparaging review that mocked the preacher’s sensibilities and reverence toward God, yet acknowledged:

Besides these rapid issues from the press, [Spurgeon] has been kept prominently before us in the frequent notices of him transferred from the English journals, and in the letters of correspondents in England to our own journals. And we ask our friend who has happened to visit London, “Did you see the Queen?” and next, “Did you hear Spurgeon?” There is scarcely any name more familiar than his throughout our land.¹⁰

To hear Spurgeon preach was to experience Victorian London.

7. “Mr. Spurgeon,” *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, June 15, 1861, 7.

8. A. P. Peabody, “The Modern Whitefield: The Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, of London. His Sermons. With an Introduction and Sketch of His Life by E. L. Magoon,” *The North American Review* 83, no. 173 (October 1856): 553–54.

9. *Ibid.*, 553.

10. A. P. Peabody, “Sermons of the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, of London, second series; Sermons of the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, of London, third series; Fast-Day Service, Held at the Crystal Palace, Sydenham, on Wednesday, October 7th, 1857; The Saint and His Saviour, or the Progress of the Soul in the Knowledge of Jesus,” *The North American Review* 86, no. 178 (January 1858): 275–80.

Throughout the years, friends and biographers also searched for the cause and empowerment of Spurgeon's ministry success. W. Y. Fullerton, student and friend of the great preacher, once asked William Robertson Nicoll, who also knew Spurgeon personally, "What then was the secret of [Spurgeon's] success?"¹¹ Fullerton explained, "He [Nicoll] must have asked it of himself, for without an instant's hesitation he answered: 'The Holy Ghost.'"¹² A friend of Charles and Susannah Spurgeon, W. Poole Balforn, once described, "[T]he secret of Mr. Spurgeon's success was, that he was *cradled in the Holy Ghost*."¹³ Balforn's phrase stayed with Susannah for the rest of her life, and years later she saw fit to include it in Spurgeon's *Autobiography*. Likewise, in 1859, when Spurgeon's congregation broke ground at the future site of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, B. W. Carr presented a history of the church and its pastors. Describing the ministry of their present pastor, Carr pronounced, "So did the Holy Ghost accompany the preaching of the gospel with divine power, that almost every sermon proved the means of awakening and regeneration to some who were hitherto 'dead in trespasses and sins.'"¹⁴ Years later, Iain Murray urged for the same in his biography of Spurgeon: "The true explanation of Spurgeon's ministry, then, is to be found in the person and power of the Holy Spirit."¹⁵

Spurgeon himself also credited the Holy Spirit for his ministry success. The person and work of the Spirit permeated Spurgeon's theology and teaching. His earliest sermon outlines, recently published as the *Lost Sermons*, provide glimpses into the young preacher's emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Spurgeon routinely made marginal notes in the hand-written outlines of these earliest sermons. He called these early outlines "skeletons," and on the illustrated title page of the first notebook from 1851 he wrote,

11. W. Y. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1920), 317.

12. *Ibid.*, 321.

13. *Autobiography* 2.181. All italics are original unless otherwise noted.

14. *NPSP* 5.350.

15. Iain H. Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 38.

“Skeletons ... and only skeletons without the Holy Ghost.”¹⁶ Likewise, at the end of sermon outline 143, Spurgeon wrote at the bottom, “Now I invoke the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷ Again, at the bottom of sermon outline 174 he wrote and twice underscored, “Holy Spirit, blow through me!”¹⁸ In his earliest sermons Spurgeon relied on the person and work of the Holy Spirit for ministry fruitfulness.

Spurgeon’s emphasis and reliance on the Holy Spirit continued throughout his ministry. In October 1851, he first preached at the church at Waterbeach where he subsequently served as pastor for more than two years. Two months after his first sermon at Waterbeach, the young preacher was preparing for the seventy-eighth sermon of his life when he penned a concise and Spirit-focused prayer that came to epitomise his pastoral ministry: “Oh Divine spirit give life, energy, fire and a blessing.”¹⁹ The Bible passage for that sermon was Matthew 11:28. Thirty years and six months later, Spurgeon again preached on Matthew 11:28 and modestly decried, “I wish that I knew how to preach. I have tried to do so for thirty years or so, but I am only now beginning to learn the art.”²⁰ Like his seventy-eighth sermon, his sermon on June 12, 1881 was Christ-centred and Spirit-focused: “Oh, that one knew how to set forth Christ, so that men perceived his beauty, and fell in love with him at first sight. Oh, Spirit of God, make it so *now*.”²¹ Spurgeon, as it turns out, did know how to preach quite well, and he consistently emphasised the person and work of the Holy Spirit throughout his lifetime of ministry.

Spurgeon also exhorted other preachers to depend on the Holy Spirit in their own preaching. Later in his ministry, Spurgeon was pressed into producing his sermon outlines for publication. From 1884–1887 he published four volumes of sermon outlines on select biblical texts ranging from Genesis to Revelation. After the tremendous success of the first volume of *My Sermon Notes*,

16. LS 1.60.

17. LS 3.88.

18. LS 3.368.

19. LS 1.343.

20. MTP 28.650.

21. MTP 28.650.

Spurgeon rapidly produced a second volume in order to “lend a handful of chips and shavings, or, if you will, a bundle of firewood, to a brother, with which he may kindle a fire on his own hearth, and prepare food for his people.”²² As he considered the widespread use of the outlines, Spurgeon included a prayer of invocation in the preface: “May the Holy Spirit breathe upon these dry bones, and make them live! May he fill each preacher’s heart with suitable emotions, and give to his mouth forcible expressions, and may the name of Jesus be thus made known to many of the Lord’s redeemed!”²³

The Development of Spurgeon’s Pneumatology

But how did Spurgeon’s theology of the Holy Spirit develop so early in his ministry? It is important to recognise that his theology of the Holy Spirit was not developed in isolation, but rather grew out of his interactions with theological writings spanning church history. The most profound influence on Spurgeon’s theology came through his reading of Puritan theology. Ernest Bacon’s biography, subtitled *Heir of the Puritans*, reflected the Puritan influence on Spurgeon’s theology.²⁴ Even in his childhood years, Spurgeon spent days in his grandfather’s library paging through volumes of Puritan works.²⁵ Later, when he described the gospel, Spurgeon would use a common refrain: the gospel came from Jesus Christ, was attested by the Scriptures, maintained by Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, and then passed through the Puritans. The final piece of the gospel heritage was always that it came through the Puritans. This was the theological tradition in which Spurgeon intended to stand.

Consequently, Spurgeon’s emphasis on the Holy Spirit reflected the emphasis that existed among the Puritans. In the introduction to Abraham Kuyper’s *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, B. B. Warfield argued, “[T]he developed doctrine of the work of

22. MSN 2.vi.

23. MSN 2.vii.

24. Ernest W. Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir of the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968).

25. *Autobiography* 1:22–24.

the Holy Spirit is an exclusively Reformation doctrine, and more particularly a Reformed doctrine, and more particularly still a Puritan doctrine.”²⁶ In 1946, Geoffrey Nuttall likewise concluded that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit “received a more thorough and detailed consideration from the Puritans of the seventeenth-century England than it has received at any other time in Christian history.”²⁷ J. I. Packer echoed the same sentiment a decade later in his paper “The Witness of the Spirit: The Puritan Teaching,” where he noted/described that, “The work of the Holy Spirit is the field in which the Puritans’ most valuable contributions to the church’s theological heritage were made.”²⁸ Michael Haykin, drawing on Warfield, helpfully summarised, “One of the distinctive marks of Puritan theology is its emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.”²⁹ Spurgeon, then, was carrying on the theological emphasis that was handed down through the Puritans.

Like his Puritan forefathers, Spurgeon’s theology of the Holy Spirit permeated his preaching, teaching, and pastoral ministries. The challenge of understanding, describing, and assessing Spurgeon’s pneumatology is not due to a lack of material on the subject; rather, the challenge comes in that there is such a vast amount of relevant material. As Haykin rightly observed, “[S]o extensive is the material by Spurgeon on the person and work of the Spirit that it would take a monograph devoted to the subject to do real justice to his teaching on the Holy Spirit.”³⁰ The fact that no such work has been produced sets this book as a needed addition to the field of Spurgeon scholarship.

26. In the introduction to Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1900), xxxiii.

27. Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), viii. Nuttall argued, “Puritan discussion and interpretation of the doctrine [of the Holy Spirit] may be treated, indeed, as a vantage-ground from which to survey, and better to understand, the various contributions and emphases of the Puritan movement as a whole” (Ibid.).

28. J. I. Packer, ed., *Puritan Papers* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Publishing, 2000), 17.

29. Michael A. G. Haykin, “‘Where the Spirit of God Is, There Is Power’: An Introduction to Spurgeon’s Teaching on the Holy Spirit,” *Churchman* 106, no. 3 (1992):198.

30. Ibid.

Outline of the Book

This book is divided into two main sections. Part I will consider Spurgeon's belief and teaching on the *nature* of the Holy Spirit; Part II will look at his teaching on the *work* of the Holy Spirit. Here is a brief description of the aim of each chapter:

Part I: *chapter 1* presents Spurgeon's Trinitarian theology, which grounded all of his theology and particularly his theology of the Holy Spirit; *chapter 2* presents Spurgeon's argument that the Holy Spirit is a person; and *chapter 3* provides Spurgeon's argument for the deity of the Holy Spirit.

Part II: *chapter 4* is Spurgeon's description of the Holy Spirit's role in inspiring Scripture; *chapter 5* addresses the Spirit's role in creation; *chapter 6* presents Spurgeon's understanding of the Spirit's role in relation to the incarnation, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and the topic of *chapter 7* is Spurgeon's theology of the covenant of grace, and specifically the Spirit's role in the covenant.

Chapters 8–16, then, focus on the Holy Spirit's work directly toward the Christian and the church. *Chapter 8* details the Spirit's work in regeneration; *chapter 9* is on the Spirit's work in conversion; *chapter 10* is on the Spirit's work in sanctification; and *chapter 11* is on the Spirit's role in the perseverance of the Christian. *Chapter 12* introduces Spurgeon's understanding of the Holy Spirit's role within the church; *chapter 13* concentrates on the Spirit's role in the ordinances (i.e., baptism and the Lord's Supper); *chapter 14* presents Spurgeon's belief in the Spirit's role in preaching; *chapter 15* covers the Spirit's role in evangelism; and *chapter 16* investigates Spurgeon's descriptions of spiritual gifts, and how the Holy Spirit utilises those gifts in the church and in the world.